

BATEMAN, Walter

DRAWER 4A PREACHER INFLUENCES

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# Abraham Lincoln and religion

Newton Bateman

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

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Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



## ONE PICTURE OF LINCOLN.

Elizabeth C. Marsh

Looking backward into the sixties, I count that a red-letter day on which I met Abraham Lincoln for the first and last time.

At Springfield on the day before Thanksgiving, 1860, my friend and I, visiting the family of Newton Bateman, Superintendent of Education for the state, had an exceptional opportunity to call upon the President-elect. Only three weeks had passed since this man of the people had triumphed and already he had begun to pay the price of victory. His apartment in the state capitol was besieged with visitors all day long and into the night—friends, politicians, workmen, women, congressmen and especially office seekers—thronged him.

Great as was our desire to see him, we hesitated to make the attempt, fearing to add one feather to the burden, but Mr. Bateman was his intimate friend and we were two teachers

from a noted seminary in the southern end of Illinois—inoffensive but sympathetic. We wanted no offices or favors, but we *did* want to look upon the man who had come to the nation's highest place, as Esther did, "for such a time as this."

The young girls among whom we were living were intensely excited by the election. Some were loyal to the old flag, and some were bitter against it. The name of Lincoln was on every lip, and while the Northern girls held it in reverence, almost in adoration, many from the border and all from the Southern states named it only with fierce scorn. It was a miniature Civil War, and we were daily astonished to see the effect of party spirit in some of our most amiable pupils.

The November afternoon was darkening, when we were admitted to the President's room. As we entered the very plain and somewhat bare apartment, the picture of him as he sat at his desk struck into my memory like a die—sharp and imperishable.

Strangely enough, he was alone. His last visitor had been an aged man, who brought him as a present an ox-chain, which he had whittled out from rails that Lincoln had split.

As Mr. Bateman introduced us, the President began to rise—I say *began*, because as he sat in his chair he seemed of ordinary height, but rising was an unfolding process—he seemed to us to come up and up, like Jack and the Beanstalk, till he towered above other men.

And oh, the fascination and pathos of that homely-handsome face! His smile was beautiful and illumined the whole countenance, banishing the sadness that seemed to have its abode there.

His greeting was cordial, his manner friendly, and after a few words, he walked across the room, took down the ox-chain from a nail where it hung, and rattling it through his fingers, said: "Is not that a fine piece of work for a man over eighty years old? See how well the links are shaped, and the whittling is so smooth. I shall keep that—out of my own rails, too."

Some talk followed, and as we mentioned our school, the President was much interested and expressed his good wishes in words earnest and sincere.

At parting, the hearty hand-clasp, the beaming smile, the magnetism of that wondrous personality, won us for all time, and always in thinking of that day we have been grateful for the privilege of meeting Abraham Lincoln *at home*—in this friendly, simple way.

We could better understand afterward the secret of his power. His transparent simplicity, his incorruptible honesty, his keen intellect and ready wit, his sunny good humor and kindly heart made friends and converted enemies. He was a Christian gentleman, and although nearly thirty-five years dead his memory is green—he is enshrined in our hearts—the noblest American.

AMHERST, MASS.





Dr. Finley also recalled the testimony of Dr. Newton Bateman.

"This beloved man, who was later my teacher and college President," he said "was Superintendent of Public Instruction in Illinois at the time when Lincoln was first nominated for the Presidency, and had a room adjoining that which Mr. Lincoln used during the eight months preceding his departure for Washington. The door between the offices was wide open, and there was a frequent passing to and fro, so that Dr. Bateman, as he says, saw Lincoln every day for several hours. Mr. Lincoln brought to Dr. Bateman, whom Lincoln called his 'little friend the big schoolmaster,' his letter of acceptance of the nomination saying: 'I think it is all right, but grammar, you know, is not my stronghold and as several persons will probably read that little thing, I wish you would look it over and see if it needs doctoring anywhere.' Dr. Bateman read it slowly, and handing it back said that it was strictly correct with one very slight exception almost too trivial to mention. 'Well, what is it?' said Mr. Lincoln. 'I wish it to be correct without any exception, however trivial.' 'Well, then,' said Dr. Bateman, remembering the rule about the avoidance of a split infinitive, 'it would be as well to transpose the 'to' and the 'not' in the sentence 'and it shall be my care to not violate it.' 'Oh,' replied Mr. Lincoln after looking at it a moment, 'you think I'd better turn those two little fellows end to end?' And he did.

"It was this little friend of Lincoln, the big schoolmaster of Illinois, afterward my college President, who was the last to press the hand of Lincoln as he set out for Washington, sixty-

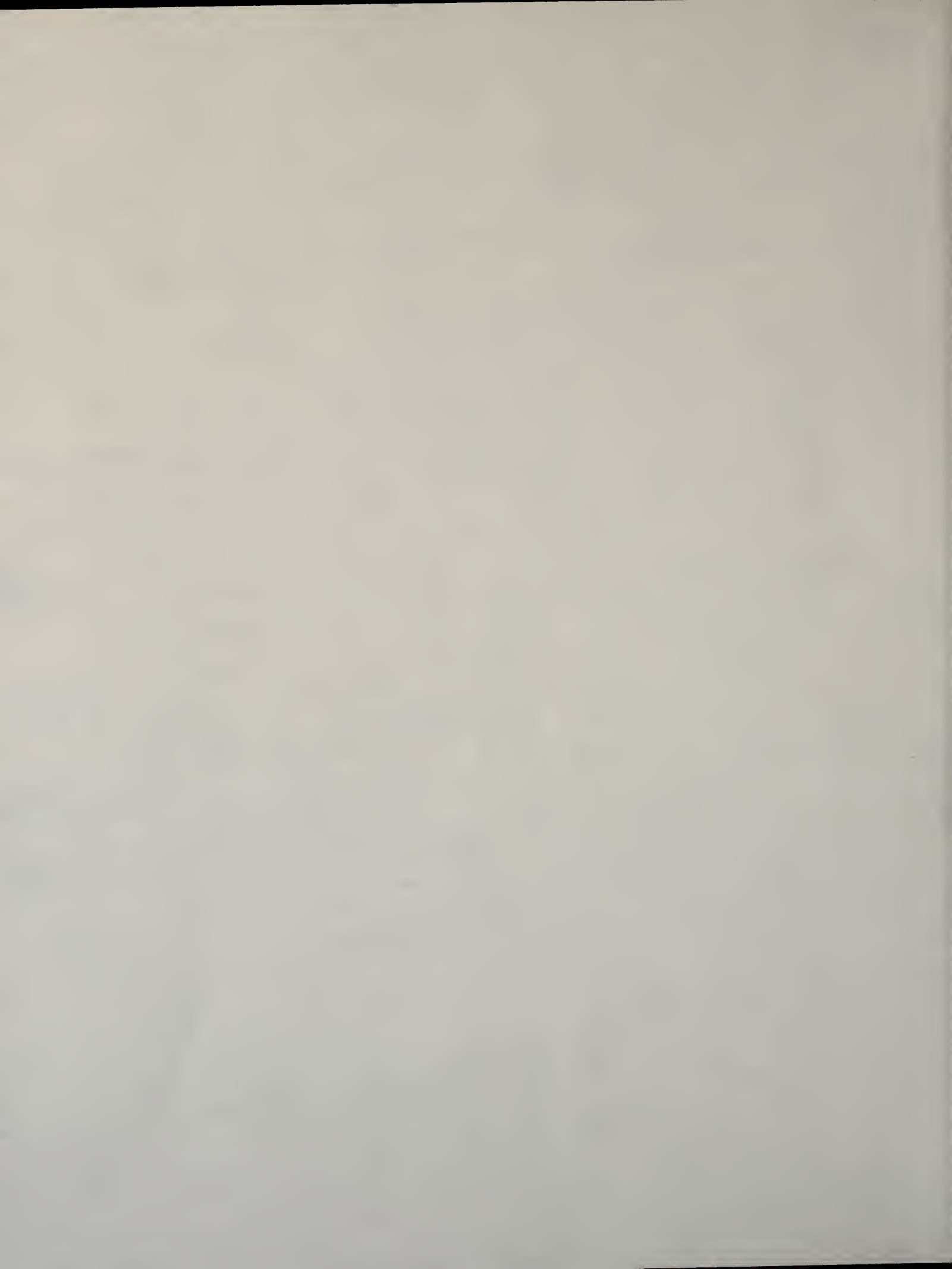
four years ago this very anniversary day and who hurried back to his office, locked his door and wrote out the speech from memory (a report of which differed in only two or three words from the stenographer's report, Dr. Bateman contending that his version was correct, for the words were 'engraved' on his heart and memory."

Recalling that Lincoln when asked to state for the Congressional Directory what his education was had written the one word, "defective," the speaker continued:

"If it was a 'defective' education that gave us such a man, then, as Lincoln said when complaint was made to him about General Grant, we ought to find out what the brand is and give it to others. What was there in the education of Abraham Lincoln to carry into a system for the education of youth in a democracy—and not only youth, but men and women?"

"The outstanding fact is that his own education did not stop with the school, nor with learning to read and write, nor even with his professional studies. He went back to Euclid at 40. He kept on growing till the sudden end of his life. He went back to Illinois 'to study law,' as he said, 'that is the supreme lesson of his education to those who are living in the Republic which is the 'central fact' in the world today. We have set up a wonderfully effectual machine for elementary education and compelled every child to pass through it on the way to literacy. But if in doing this we do not inspire or foster in the child a zeal for knowledge, a desire to go on and on as did Lincoln in his search for ideas and in his effort to put them into plain language, bounding his thought North, South, East and West, and finally demonstrating it, we are missing the major purpose of education."

1925





## LINCOLN'S RELIGION

Lincoln had a firm faith and belief in God. In the campaign of 1860, he was greatly pained by the canvass of the voters in Springfield which showed that of the twenty clergymen in the city all but three were against him. In speaking of this to Hon. Newton Bateman, then State Superintendent of Schools in Illinois, Lincoln said:

I know there is a God and that He hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming and I know His hand is in it. If He has a place and work for me, and I think He has, I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know I am right because I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God. I have told them that a house divided against itself can not stand, and Christ and reason say the same thing; and they will find it so. Douglas doesn't care whether slavery is voted up or voted down, but God cares and humanity cares, and I care; and with God's help I shall not fail. I may not see the end, but it will come and I shall be vindicated; and these men will find that they have not read their Bibles aright.

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### MR. LINCOLN'S RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS.

The profound moral earnestness of Mr. Lincoln won for him the confidence of the people, and when his judgment differed from theirs, their trust was still unshaken. Dr. Holland, in his "Life of Lincoln," brings out in strong relief the moral convictions which made his life so noble and yet so sad. The following is a good illustration:

Mr. Newton Bateman, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the state of Illinois, occupied a room adjoining and opening into the Executive Chamber. Frequently this door was open during Mr. Lincoln's receptions; and throughout the seven months or more of his occupation, Mr. Bateman saw him every day. Often when Mr. Lincoln was tired he closed the door against all intrusion, and called Mr. Bateman into his room for a quiet talk. On one of these occasions Mr. Lincoln took up a book containing a careful canvass of the city of Springfield in which he lived, showing the candidate for whom each citizen had declared it his intention to vote in the approaching election. Mr. Lincoln's friends had, doubtless at his own request, placed the result of the canvass in his hands. This was toward the close of October, and only a few days before the election. Calling Mr. Bateman to a seat at his side, having previously locked all the doors, he said:

"Let us look over this book. I wish particularly to see how the ministers of Springfield are going to vote."

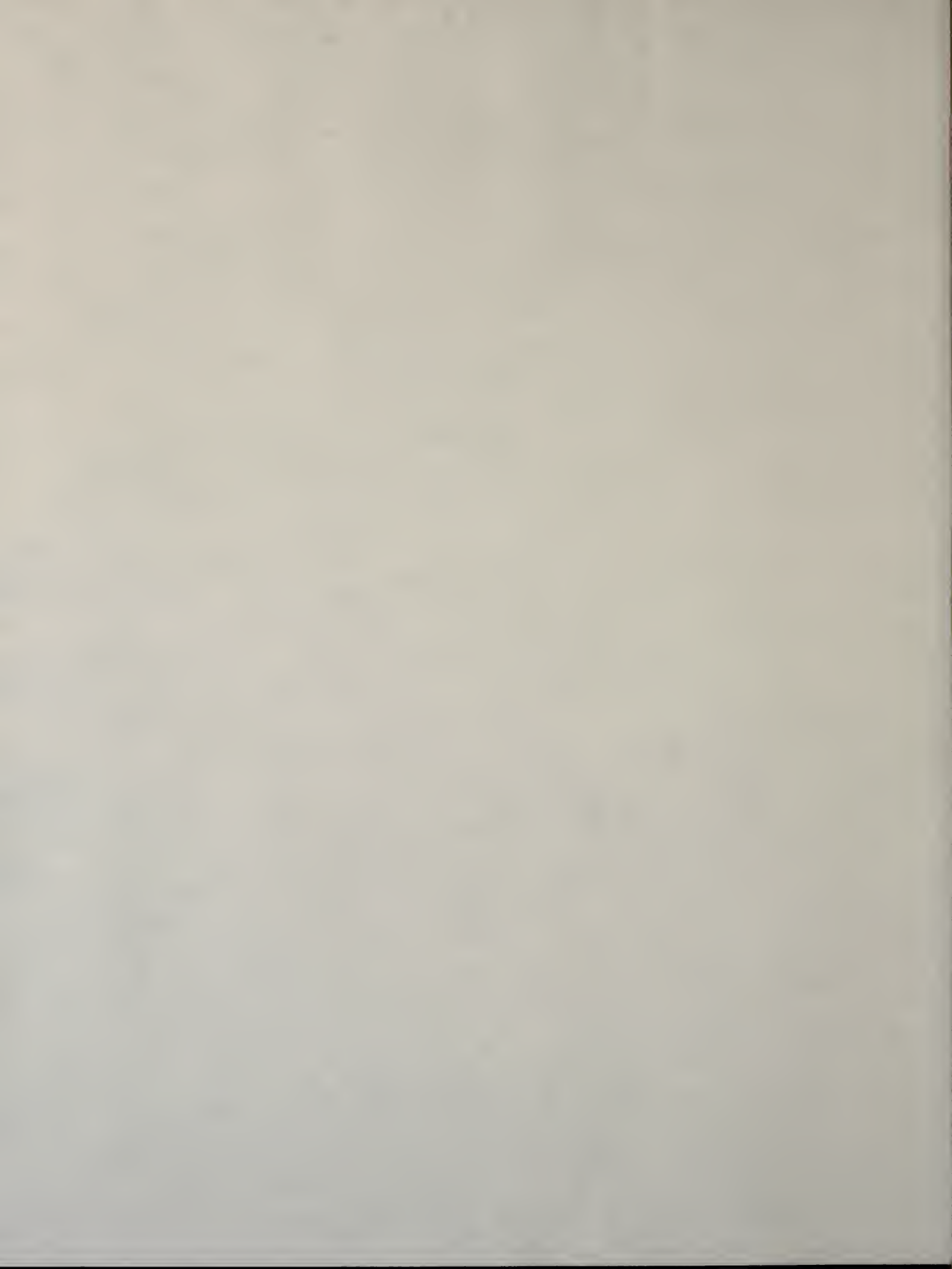
The leaves were turned, one by one, and as the names were examined, Mr. Lincoln frequently asked if this one and that were not a minister, or an elder, or the member of such and such a church, and sadly expressed his surprise on receiving an affirmative answer. In that manner they went through the book, and then he closed it and sat silently and for some minutes regarding a memorandum in pencil which lay before him.

At length he turned to Mr. Bateman, with a face full of sadness, and said: "Here are twenty-three ministers, of different denominations, and all of them are against me but three; and here are a great many prominent members of the churches, a very large majority of whom are against me. Mr. Bateman, I am not a Christian—God knows I would be one—but I have carefully read the Bible, and I do not so understand this book;" and he drew from his bosom a pocket New Testament. "These men well know," he continued, "that I am for freedom in the

territories, freedom every-where as far as the Constitution and laws will permit, and that my opponents are for slavery. They know this, and yet, with this book in their hands, in the light of which human bondage can not live a moment, they are going to vote against me. I do not understand it all."

Here Mr. Lincoln paused—paused for long minutes, his features surcharged with emotion. Then he rose and walked up and down the room in the effort to retain or regain his self-possession. Stopping at last, he said, with a trembling voice and his cheeks wet with tears:

"I know there is a God, and that He hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming, and I know that His hand is in it. If he has a place and work for me, and I think he has, I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is every thing. I know I am right, because I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God. I have told them that a house divided against itself can not stand, and Christ and reason say the same; and they will find it so. Douglas don't care whether slavery is voted up or voted down, but God cares, and humanity cares, and I care; and with God's help I shall not fail. I may not see the end; but it will come and I shall be vindicated; and these men will find that they have not read their Bibles aright."



DATEMAN, No. 100

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1870-1871

